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THE PARDONER'S TAVERN

Of late certain oracular critics have lost no opportunity to accuse present-day Anglistic scholarship of an undue devotion to medieval themes; and valiant defenders have arisen to protest against this charge of exclusive absorption in a supposedly narrow phase of the past. To the present writer the charge seems distinctly "not proven," inasmuch as nothing is rarer among professed medievalists than the medieval perspective. By many reputable students of the literature of the Middle Ages any demonstration of the point of view of that period is greeted with shocked incredulity, because it must inevitably clash with the conceptions of our own time. From this unimaginative outlook, from this inability of the Peter Bells of scholarship to "fancy another situation from that in which they stood," no one has suffered more than Chaucer. Every fact of his life has been exploited, every line of his verse has been weighed, every source of his inspiration has been sought. All that has been missed is the one thing that seems absolutely essential to the proper interpretation of his poetry, his horizon, that is, his strict confinement within the bounds of fourteenth-century thought. "Chaucer, temp. 1890 or 1900 or 1914" has been studied to repletion. "Chaucer, temp. 1390" has been almost disregarded.

It is our present duty to remedy this neglect, else we shall never read rightly. One of the chief scholars of England, in giving hearty assent to my recently broached thesis of Chaucer's architectonic use of the motif of the Deadly Sins,¹ points out one phase of this unfortunate modernism:—"Of course your view will by many be regarded as fanciful. because it is difficult for us moderns to keep fully in mind the large place that theology had in the intellectual interests of cultured lay Englishmen in the fourteenth century, and indeed much later. Even very able scholars have, I think, sometimes reasoned in a way that shows imperfect apprehension of this." And so when Chaucer follows what this

¹ *Publications of Modern Language Association*, March 1914.

same clear-eyed scholar calls, "the line of least resistance by falling into the well-worn *exempla* track," there are some who are sadly puzzled by a design so different from their twentieth-century conception of a poet's province. Is it permitted me to regard as a happy augury the readiness of certain eminent specialists and Chaucer-lovers to approve my carefully considered effort to walk within the only pales that Chaucer knew? It seems to them as to me that, as scholars, we must always ask this question, "What did our medieval thinker mean by this?" and not, "What is the obvious meaning to the casual reader of to-day, who has made no attempt to plumb the depths and shallows of medieval thought?"

Before we turn to the tale that is our chief concern, let me cite several instances in which Chaucer's intent has been altogether lost. I have already commented at length upon the delicious irony of a long harangue against Pride in the tale of the proudest figure among the pilgrims, the Wife of Bath. Such a sermon is quite in accord with that just knowledge of human nature which makes each wayfarer assail his individual fault or the notorious weakness of his type. But the homily must fit the story as well as the storyteller, if the author is an artist. And the place of this preachment in the tale has been as thoroughly ignored as its relation to the Wife. No one has suggested in this connection—no one with only the modern outlook could suggest—that the Loathly Dame's discourse on Pride introduces a common element in the conception of courtly love. It is this Vice against which the God of Love warns the "gentle lover" of the *Romaunt of the Rose* (2245 f.) :—

For pryde is founde in every part
Contrarie unto Loves art.
And he that loveth trewely
Shulde him contene jolily,
Withouten pryde in sondry wyse.²

The verbal parallels between the Dame's exhortation to "gentillesse" (D 1109f.) and the God of Love's command, *Romaunt of the Rose*, 2187f., have been often noted with never a thought of the bearing of this relation upon the

² See Dodd's *Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower*, p. 26.

essential purpose of the Wife's Tale of obedience in love. Troilus, who, like the knight of the Wife's Tale, is an "obedient" lover in a courtly story, divests himself utterly, under Love's influence, of the Sin of Pride (I, 1079f.) :—

For he bicom the frendlyeste wight,
The gentileste, and eek the moste free,
The thriftieste and oon the beste knight,
That in his tyme was, or mighte be.
Dede were his japes and his crueltee,
His heighe port and his manere estraunge,
And ech of tho gan for a vertu chaunge.

So far from being "irrelevant," the sermon of the Wife's story is not only, like all the homilies in the Sins tales, in ironical accord with the character of the narrator, but is admirably suited to the context of romantic love.^{2a} How obvious all this must have been to the medieval reader!

Or to take another illustration of the wide gap between our critical viewpoint and fourteenth-century literary design. To our way of thinking nothing could be less apposite than the Poverty prologue, which introduces the Man of Law's Tale of Constance. But every man of the Middle Ages must have recognized at once the inherent fitness of prefacing a tale of Envy—for Chaucer here is in Gower's wake³—with stanzas illustrating such a dominant phase of Envy as "grucchyng" against one's wretched lot and "sorwe of other mannes wele" (see *Parson's Tale*, 483, 498) or, more precisely, that Impatient Poverty which is traditionally associated with Envy even as late as the middle sixteenth century.⁴

The last word has not been said on the subject of Chaucer's direct sources, despite the energy of hunters. Patristic or-

^{2a} To Chaucer as to his great exemplar, "Amore e 'l cor gentil sono una cosa."

³ As I have already shown in my *Publications* article, Chaucer uses four of Gower's stories to illustrate the same Sins. No one has noted that our poet's independent development of *exemplum* themes suggested by his contemporary recalls the very similar indebtedness of *The Legend of Good women* to Boccaccio's topics rather than to his stories.

⁴ I discuss in *The Nation*, July 9, 1914, the light cast by the morality, "Impatient Poverty", circa 1560 (*"Lost" Tudor Plays*, edited by Farmer), upon the time-honored relation between this form of Poverty and Envy.

igins of large portions of the Summoner's and Physician's Tales have been entirely disregarded, as I show in an article now in press. Moreover far too little has been made of the parallels between our poet's motives and those of his contemporaries, Gower, Langland, Wyclif. But the source-hunter, hard on the trail of obvious plunderings, is in danger of forgetting that a far larger significance than unquestioned liftings can possibly possess often attaches to close resemblances between two authors who are giving and taking nought directly but who are both repeating current fancies. Such parallels constitute the highest evidence for an established tradition and hence are our safest guides to a proper perspective. Let me illustrate the value of such a study of tradition by a comparison between some of Chaucer's familiar conceptions and the stock figures of that remarkable summary of the typical weaknesses and weaklings of medieval society, the *Ship of Fools*.

Among the many social types preserved in Barclay's early sixteenth-century version of the famous satire⁵ are the Proud and Shrewish Wife and the Drunken Cook. The picture of the woman as sometimes wise, but often foolish of counsel, largely given to chiding, so wrathful that "she passyth all the cruel bestis of Inde"—even the tiger robbed of her whelps,—ever devising scorn, full of guile and falsehood, and emptying by her proud apparel her husband's purse, acknowledging Pride as lady and mistress, well images a conception of the sex which Chaucer turned to large account and which long persisted in literature.⁶ Indeed the sketch of the Wife of Bath owes quite as much to this tradition as to the *Romaunt of the Rose* or to the *Miroir du Mariage*. To the proverbial drunkenness of Cooks, which is as old as classical comedy, Barclay devotes an entire section (II, 91-93). The

⁵ Barclay's *Ship of Fools*, edited by Jamieson, 1874, 2 vols.

⁶Such sixteenth-century products as "The Proude Wyves Pater Noster," "The Wife Lapped in Morrelles Skin," "The Pride and Abuse of Women," "A Glasse to Viewe the Pride of Vaineglorious Women," (Hazlitt, *Remains of Early Popular Poetry*, vol. IV.), all continue the tradition that feminizes the First of the Deadly Sins in Langland, Chaucer and the example-books, and much later in Spenser.

foolish and bawdy Cook, the very type of glutton and rioter, consuming wine and ale till all the best be gone and his master's good be consumed, must have been a well-known figure long before he invited on the Canterbury Road the chiding of his superior officer, the Manciple.⁷ But the satirist devotes the largest space in his *Ship* to the tavern-revelers—drinkers, lechers, dicers, blasphemers—who are revealed so grimly in the “moralities” of the *Pardoner's Tale*. To this wretched crew we shall soon give full attention.

It seems to me that everything that is really essential in the setting of the *Pardoner's Tale* has been entirely disregarded in the many elaborate discussions of the rascal's contribution, simply because commentators have failed to realize that the great master of irony selects a tavern for his ribald's sermon against tavern-revels, the home of Gluttony as the scene of violent tirades against Gluttony and its accessory faults. It is my present purpose to show two things: first that the tavern is the stage of the Pardoner's harangues; and secondly, that these harangues are directed against those vices which are ever associated with taverns in medieval tradition. Of the other and perhaps more important phase of the Pardoner's character and discourse, his thorough-going revelation of Avarice by positive practice and negative precept, it is needless to speak now.

No long argument is necessary to show that the Pardoner and his fellows do not leave the tavern-benches just after the corny ale has been quaffed and his prologue is complete. Jusserand has rightly observed:⁸ “On the further bench of the tavern the Pardoner remains still seated. There enter Chaucer, the Knight, the Squire, the Friar, the Host—old acquaintances. We are by ourselves, no one needs be afraid of speaking, the foaming ale renders hearts expansive; here the secret coils of that tortuous soul unfold to view; he gives us the summary of a whole life, the theory of his existence, the key to all his secrets.” But the observant

⁷ It has not been recognized that the quarrels of the Canterbury pilgrims are as professional and typical as the characters themselves. But more of this in another place.

⁸ *English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages*, pp. 332-333.

French scholar does not record that the pilgrims are still seated in the ale-house, when, at the conclusion of his tale, the wonderful scoundrel bids them (C 925-926) :

Cometh forth anon and kneleth heer adoun,
And mekely receyveth my pardoun.

Will anyone dare suggest that the company are now ahorse and that the Pardoner proposes to them to dismount that he may confer absolution? Nor can it be alleged that the Pardoner is here merely rehearsing a sermon without thought of his present company or surroundings—as indeed he is doing some lines above when he calls, “Cometh up, ye wyves, offreth of your wolles!” and adds, “Lo, sirs, thus I preche.” He now not only alludes to the story that he has just told, “But, sirs, o word forgot I in my tale,” but proceeds to discuss the pilgrims’ wayfaring through town’s end and countryside in the high honor and worth of his illustrious companionship. We are explicitly told at the end of the epilogue (C 968) that the pilgrims “riden forth hir weye”—a phrase that is elsewhere used (A 856) to indicate a similar resumption of the journey after a stop. What infinite zest it adds to the Pardoner’s arraignment of tavern follies to realize that every count of his indictment is pronounced amid huge creature-comfort in the joys of an ale-house—the clink of canakins, the laughter of tap wenches, the rattle of dice, the sound of oaths! The irony of the environment is as delicious as the mockery of personality—both utterly at variance with the tenor of the Pardoner’s sentences, so gravely pronounced. How much of Chaucer’s fun we moderns miss!

The purport of the Pardoner’s sermonizing is altogether lost, if we pass over it lightly as “a long discussion on the sins of swearing, gluttony, dicing and other of the deadly sins.” We have double evidence of the strongest that the Pardoner is exemplifying only the vices of the tavern. First, Chaucer, here, as in other Sins tales, derives his application—else no artist he—directly from the substance of his story. His moralities follow immediately his picture of the tavern, that abode of Gluttony in all its phases—drinking, lechery,

hazardry, and great oaths. In this "devil's temple" his young folk

pleye at dees bothe day and night,
And ete also and drinken over hir might.
.....
Hir othes been so grete and so dampnable.

Among them is kindled and blown

the fyr of lecherye,
That is annexed unto glotonye.

It is significant that in the poet's other picture of tavern revel, the contribution of the wine-bibbing Cook (A 4365f.), drinking, wenching, dicing, find a large place.

All this is undeniable. Our other evidence, that of tradition, needs larger illustration. In accounts of the Deadly Seven we find that Gluttony includes "Sins of the Tavern," and moreover that these sins are the very vices enumerated by Chaucer. Langland's sketch of Gluttony is a tavern scene (*Piers Plowman*, B, V, 304f.). Dan Michel, in his *Ayenbite of Inwit* (pp. 56-57), following *Le Mireour du Monde* (pp. 170-171), discusses, under the head of Gluttony, "the zennes thet byeth ydo ine the taverne," and then proceeds much in Chaucer's wise:—"The tauerne ys the scole of the dyeule huere his deciples studieth, and his ozene chapele ther huer me deth his seruise and ther huer he maketh his miracles zuiche ase behoueth to the dyeule Ac the dyeuel deth al ayenward ine the tauerne. Vor huanne the glotoun geth in to the tauerne ha geth oprijt; huanne he comth ayen, he ne heth uot thet him moze sostyeni ne here." Likewise the anonymous author of *Jacob's Well*⁹ writes under the caption, "De Gula" (p. 147): "At the tauerne often the glotonye begynneth; for the tauerne is welle of glotonye, for it may be clepyd the develys scolehous & the develys chapel, for there his dyscyples stodyen & syngyn, bothe day & niȝt, & there the deuyl doth meraclys to his seruantys, etc."¹⁰ And Bar-

⁹ *Early English Text Society*, 115 (1900).

¹⁰ Compare Royster, *A Middle English Treatise on the Ten Commandments, Introduction*, pp. ix-x. "Devil's Chapel" is still a potent phrase on the "temperance" platform.

clay, in the *Ship of Fools* thus speaks of the Sin of Gluttony (I, 93):—

The people that are acloyed with this synne,
On no thyng els theyr myndes wyll aply:
Saue to the wyne and ale stakes to renne
And there as bestes to stryue and drinke auy.

How then, in the light of medieval perspective, could Chaucer more accurately illustrate the Sin of Gluttony than by a tavern picture drawn by a tavern reveler seated in the very hour of his sermonizing on a tavern bench?

Moreover the sins assailed by the Pardoner are those conventionally associated with Gluttony and the tavern. I have already demonstrated at sufficient length in my *Publications* article (pp. 105-106) that the close relation between Lechery and Gluttony, based upon Ephesians V, 18, is a commonplace of all medieval descriptions of Gluttony and that, in many sketches of this Sin, the *exemplum* of Lot and his daughters (Genesis XIX) finds mention. This traditional relation is still strong in the *Ship of Fools*:

But namely dronkennes and wretchyd Glotony
By their excess and superfluyte
Engendreth the rote of cursed Lechery.

It was therefore inevitable in the irony of things that the companion Sin should be assailed by this typical Glutton who has "a jolly wench in every town."¹¹

The two other accessories of Gluttony—Hazardry and Blasphemy—are always closely associated in medieval literature. One of the most famous of all *exempla* is that of the unlucky dicer who blasphemes the Virgin and loses his eyes.¹² Miss Petersen¹³ finds a close parallel to the setting of the Pardoner's Tale in the account by Thomas Cantipratensis of a Brabant

¹¹ In the English Moralities wenching is ever associated with the life of taverns. In the *Digby Play* Mary Magdalene is led by Lechery to a tavern where she is tempted and falls. In *Nature Sensuality* conducts Man to a tavern and to the society of Margery. In the *Interlude of Youth Riot* suggests to his victim that they repair to the tavern for a surfeit of wine and a kiss from a pretty wench.

¹² See Herolt, s. v. "Blasphemia"; Herbert, *Catalogue of Romances*, III, 360, 608, 624, 648, 665.

¹³ *The Sources of the Nonne Prestes Tale*, p. 98.

"cellarium in quo perditissimi adolescentes ad ludum tessarum sedentes blasphemiiis et juramentis ad invicem contendebant." So Bromyard, in his *Summa Predicantium*, combines under "Gula" with drinking and wenching illicit oaths and forbidden games.¹⁴ In Barclay's account of Card Players and Dicers (II, 71-72) we learn that

the woundes of God ar sworne,
His armys, herte and bonys, almoste at every worde;
Thus is our Sauyour amonge these caytyfs torne.

Similarly under "Blasphemers and Sweres":—

The tables, tenys, cardis or the dyce
Ar chefe begynnynge of this vnhappynes,
For whan the game wyll nat well aryse
And all the players troubled by dronkenes,
Than suche caytyfs as joy in this exces
At eche worde labour our Sauyour to tere
With othes abhomyneable whiche they ungodly swere.

Occleve's Beggar confesses (*Regement of Princes*, ll. 626f.) that, playing dice all night at the tavern, he dismembered with great oaths and rent limb from limb "the former of every creature." Finally our chief authority, the Pardoner himself, tells us very plainly (C 650f.) that Cursing arises over the dice.

Hasardry, though it has already received treatment under Avarice (as in the Parson's Tale), is one of the subheads of Gluttony in the *Ayenbite of Inwit* (p. 52); and "Great Oaths" is subordinate to Gluttony in both Bromyard and Langland (B, VI, 92, V, 314, XIII, 400). Indeed Langland's Glutton thus makes his shrift (B, V, 374f.):—

"I glotoun," quod the gome, "gylti me gelde,
That I have trespassed with my tonge, I can nougte telle how ofte,
Sworen 'goddes soule' and 'so god me help and halidom,'
There no nede ne was nyne hundreth tymes."

Moreover it is under Gluttony (I, 96) that Barclay writes:—

Some swereth armys, nayles, herte and body,
Terynge our lord worse than the Jowes hym arayed.¹⁵

¹⁴ See my *Publications* article, pp. 105.

¹⁵ An interesting *exemplum* of the danger of Great Oaths—not included in Skeat's elaborate notes upon this rendering of the Christ (V, 275-276, 284)—is "The Tale of the Bleeding Child", *Handlyng Synne*, 665-800, and *Gesta Romanorum* (English version), No. LXXXVIII (*E. E. T. S., Extra Series*, 33, pp. 409, 506).

How could a medieval poet better illustrate the Sin of Gluttony than by due discussion of each of its traditional phases or accessories? There is nothing confused or heterogeneous in the Pardoner's summary of sins in the application at the close of his tale (C 895-899). It is an orderly exposition in the true *exemplum* manner of the two Deadly Sins illustrated by his story and by his own practice and assailed in his sermons: first, cursed Avarice, that leads to homicide; then Gluttony and its three accessories, Luxury, Hasardry and Blasphemy. Indeed it is as clear-cut as Langland's famous feofment (B, II, 92-93):—

Glotonye he gaf hem eke and grete othes togydere,
And alday to drynke at dyuerse tauernes.

In his use of Deadly Sins material in the Pardoner's moralities, as in his other *exempla* of the Vices, Chaucer is largely indebted to the material of his Parson's Tale. This relation has already been so fully indicated by scholars¹⁶ that it need not long detain us. It is interesting that the Parson, like Peraldus, includes Hasardry under Avarice and Great Oaths under Wrath. This arrangement, however, does not debar the poet, when fashioning the Pardoner, from combining Dicing and Swearing in the traditional conception of the Glutton as a lord of tavern revels and misrule rather than as a mere slave of food and drink. Even the Parson, who unlike Dan Michel, Langland, Bromyard, and Barclay, views Gluttony in its narrower aspect, recognizes its close bond with Lechery (I, 836), "for thise two sinnes been so ny cosins that ofte tyme they wol nat departe;" and expressly indicates the tie between Hasardry and Blasphemy (I, 792), "Now comth hasardrye with hise apurtenances, as tables and raffles; of which comth deceite, false othes, chydinges, and alle ravines, blaspheminge and reneyinge of God, etc."

If the Pardoner's relation to his background has been ignored, the variance of his gluttonous practice from his sober precept disregarded, the tenor of his precept misunderstood, so his clash with one of the other pilgrims has been entirely

¹⁶ See Koepfel, *Herrig's Archiv*, LXXXVII, pp. 33-54; Notes to Skeat's edition; Miss Petersen, *Sources of the Parson's Tale*, passim; my *Publications* article, 105, 115.

unapprehended. The reader has only to compare the oaths which the Pardoner places under the ban (C 651-652):—

By Goddes precious herte and by his nayles
And by the blode of Crist, that it is in Hayles.

with the very recent blasphemy of the Host's link between the tales of the Physician and the Pardoner, "by nayles and by blood!" (C 288) and "by Corpus bones" (C 314), in order to recognize that our specious rascal convicts the Landlord of sin long before he further invites his wrath by summoning him to "kisse the reliks everichon" (C 946). And here it is necessary to note that the Host's swearing, for which he is so ready to take up the cudgels against Lollards (B 1172-1173),¹⁷ is typical of his profession. If the tavern is the breeding-place of oaths, it is inevitable that the taverner should be an adept in blasphemy. Barclay, in a single line (I, 12), gives ample evidence that the Host's cursing is traditional, "Blasphemers of Christ, hostlers and taverners." It is of course a striking feature of the situation that the Pardoner himself, professed champion of the Second Commandment, is a constant offender against its decree: D 164, "by God and by Seint John"; C 320, "by Seint Ronyon" (where he repeats the oath of the Host); C 457, "by God".

Fortunately contemporary interpretation of the character of the Pardoner is no mere matter of surmise. That he—and not the Friar, who "knew the tavernes wel in every toun" (Prologue, A 240)—was deemed the typical tavern-reveler of the company, fond of both his glass and his lass, is put beyond all question by the "Prologue of the Merry Adventure of the Pardoner with a Tapster at Canterbury", which prefaces the pseudo-Chaucerian sequel to the Tales, the *Tale of Beryn*. No sooner are the pilgrims installed at the "Cheker of the Hope" inn at the cathedral city than the Pardoner "as a man i-lernyd of such kyndnes" makes warm

¹⁷The citation by a contemporary, Knighton, Anno 1388 (*Rolls Series*, 92, II, 262) of Wycliffite opinions is not inapposite here: "Item quod non licet aliquo modo jurare. Nota ibi isti firmandus, nam sequela cujuslibet dicti eorum talis erat, 'I am sykyr, it is soth,' vel sic, 'Withoute doute, it is so.'" See Trevelyan, *England in the Age of Wycliffe*, p. 317; and Arnold, *Wyclif's Works*, III, 332.

friends with Kit the Tapster, embracing her by the middle, chucking her under the chin and tempting her with a groat. The outcome of the intrigue is as sorry as anything in Smollett. The Pardoner seeks to secure the Tapster for his own, but, in the old phrase, he "drinks without the cup," though she feigns full consent. After ordering for his newly found love and himself "a cawdle of wine and sugar", the Pardoner returns to the company. Light-hearted with song, he leaves them at bedtime and goes in search of his lowly lady. Then follows the horse-play. The Pardoner scratches and whines at the locked door of the Tapster; but he is soundly thrashed by the Tapster's Paramour, and is chased and chevied by Jack the Hostler, a creature of Host-like oaths. He is finally forced to lie down in the litter of a great Welsh dog, which bites him in the thigh. The poor wretch finds nought save curses to assuage his anger and despair. On the morrow the unhappy Pardoner washes the blood off his cheeks, binds up his head and rides away singing in the midst of the company.

Now whence was this conception of the Pardoner derived? Certainly not from the General Prologue, where we hear nothing of potent potting or of amorous adventures. Nor is this the hypocritical exponent of Avarice known to every reader. This *picaro* is the gluttonous Pardoner of his prologue and tale, lickerish, lecherous, blasphemous, unable ever to resist the lure of ale-stake or of petticoat, bibulously preaching sermons against Gluttony from a tavern-bench.¹⁸ Moreover what convincing testimony to the Pardoner's repute in the company is given by the cry of the gentles (C 324), when the Host heralds this "noble ecclesiaste:" "Nay, let him telle us of no ribaudye!"¹⁹ It must be remembered that

¹⁸ Furnivall has noted, in his Introduction to the *Tale of Beryn* (*Chaucer Society*, 1887, *Early English Text Society*, 1909), how well the anonymous author preserves the traits of Chaucer's pilgrims.

¹⁹ Indulgence in ribald tales is yet another trait of medieval Gluttony. Langland's Glutton says of himself (B. V, 383), "For loue of tales, in tauernes to drynke the more I dined," and (C. VII, 433), "ich fedde me with ale out of reson among rybaudes here rybaudrye to huyre."

the Wife of Bath has already (*contra* the Chaucer Society, her tale certainly precedes the Pardoner's) suggested (D 170-171) that he is over-fond of ale. Hence both internal and external evidence shows that the chief tavern-haunter of the fellowship is selected to inveigh against the evils of "the devil's temple"—in due accord with the design that makes each pilgrim denounce his peculiar weakness.

This article is an implicit plea not only for the imaginative insight which enables us to enter into the life of another age and to read its poet's words aright, but also for that humbler every-day quality of accurate observation which alone makes it possible for us to read a poet's words at all. I have encountered from scholars of repute such objections as this: Despite the Manciple's lengthy chiding of the Cook (H 25f.)—if anyone is so incautious as to admit that he really does chide the Cook—he certainly cannot be deemed a Chider. And why not? Because, forsooth, he is called in the General Prologue (A 567), to which many of us apparently confine our reading, "a gentil Maunciple." Just as though our wrathful Summoner were not described in the same General Prologue (A 647) as a "gentil harlot and a kinde", and as though "the lost soul" of our present discussion were not "a gentil Pardoner" (A 669). Likewise the Man of Law is absolved from all Envy by the staunch adherent of the General Prologue, who overlooks entirely the Impatient Poverty (Envy) prologue, with which he prefaces Gower's Envy tale. So the Pardoner must not be considered a typical glutton or tavern-reveller—once more the negative evidence of the General Prologue!—though this lover of "cakes and ale" is so proclaimed by his own confession, by his perverse sermonizing, by the pot-house setting of his story and by his contemporary reputation. It will be a happy day for our contemplation of the great works of our medieval literature, when the critical astigmatism that either disregards the text altogether or sees it blurredly through the medium of modern lenses yields to the undimmed vision that views the poet's thought in the large light of the poet's own perspective.

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